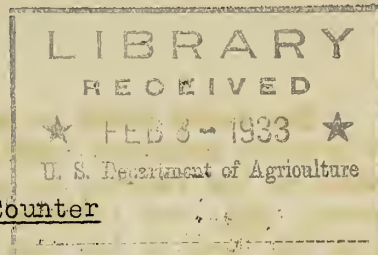


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HOUSEHOLD CALENDAR

Choosing Household Textiles on the Retail Counter

A radio talk by Miss Ruth O'Brien, Bureau of Home Economics, delivered in the Department of Agriculture period of the National Farm and Home Hour, broadcast by a network of 48 associate stations, Tuesday, January 17, 1933.

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These days many of us are thinking of the towels and other domestics offered in the retail stores at astonishingly low prices. We are all asking the same question: "Are these 'bargains' really bargains?"

We all want to buy wisely not only for the sake of our own family's welfare but also to help the economic situation of the whole country. And even such a homely thing as a towel is of importance in the economic picture. Did you know that in 1929 over 157 million square yards of towels and toweling were manufactured in this country and over 12 million square yards of wash cloths?

Your purchase and my purchase together keep this important American industry going. And when we make our purchases carefully we do our share in encouraging the production of really good materials. And this brings us back to the first question: How are we to know when a bargain-counter towel is really a bargain?

Well, towels are bargains if they are strongly made of good quality fiber and yarns and if they do the job they are supposed to do - that is, absorb water. Personally, I don't agree with the couplet which says:

"Welcome is the guest who by instinct seems to know
Which towel is meant for use and which is meant for show."

In my opinion, all towels are meant for use. If they are not, something is wrong. The right kind of towels absorb water readily. They are convenient in weight and size. And they are sturdy enough to withstand vigorous and frequent launderings.

Linen and cotton are old standbys for this purpose. You don't need me to remind you that linen is one of the most absorbent of all fibers. But few of us can afford the finest of linen fabrics and we sometimes wonder about the quality of towels we find labeled "all linen" and offered at a very low price. Very often these are made of tow linen, spelled t-o-w you remember. This tow linen is made of the short flax fibers which are combed out during the preparation of the long ones for spinning. These tow fibers, if not too short, make good absorbent towelings. But if very short, we get a fuzzy fabric which leaves lint on our hands or on the dishes as we wipe them. Because the fabric sheds its fibers quickly it wears out quickly, and such a linen towel is not as good as a cotton one sold for the same price. It's the same old story - if a towel is going to wear, it must be made of long fibers spun into good substantial yarns which in turn are put into a strong fabric.

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The terry cloth or so-called Turkish towel is very popular, chiefly because it absorbs moisture readily. The textile manufacturer saw that by making loops of yarns on the fabric, he could increase the surface exposed for the absorption of water. But, and this is a point to watch, these loops must be securely fastened into the base of the fabric. Did you ever get hold of a towel or a washcloth so poorly made that a snag on one of the loops would pull out a whole string of loops and pucker up the whole cloth? Try gently pulling at the loops of the next towel you examine and see just how well it is made. I have also seen towels in which the loops were of such loosely twisted, weak yarns that they wore right off, leaving bald spots.

Beware of very fancy and ornate towels. It generally follows that the fancier the fabric is, the greater the risk that the colors will fade and the construction be weak. Combinations of different kinds of fibers are not the best buys from the standpoint of wear. Sometimes they shrink differently, and no matter how carefully you iron the towel it still looks puckered. Or again, one fiber proves to be much weaker than the other or it fades more.

And selvages - I find more towels worn out at the selvages than any other one place. Be sure the selvages are well reinforced. Also, if you're buying hemmed towels see that hems are well made.

And what about size? I'm thinking of some very large towels bought once by a member of my family who thought that a large man needed a very large towel. Well, I hope they fully satisfied his suppressed desires. We women found them the most ungainly and inconvenient things in the world to handle. They added considerably to our bill when we sent them to a commercial laundry and brought forth vigorous complaints from any one who tried to wash them at home. Finally they wore out in the middle, and left great quantities of unworn fabric around the sides. Those towels were the cause of many a family discussion. So I've come to believe that excessively large towels may give a feeling of luxury to the user but they are not practical buys.

Now, shall we sum up these points? A towel is a good buy if and when it is made of:

Fibers all of the same kind; that is, all linen or all cotton,
Long fibers spun into strong yarns,
Every yarn well fastened into the foundation of the fabric,
Reinforced selvages and well-made hems,
And last but not least, a towel should be of such a size and weight that
it can be handled and laundered easily.

When you go shopping this week, study the bargain towels with these points in mind.